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Randolph AFB, Texas



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S.A.'s military transformation task force shifts into high gear

San Antonio Business Journal - March 24, 2006

by [Catherine Dominguez](#)

Local business and government leaders are moving into high gear with a recently formed task force to address the many issues surrounding the plans for restructuring San Antonio's military bases.

The changes stem from the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) committee decision in May of last year.

On May 13, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld recommended closing Brooks City-Base and 32 other installations across the nation as part of the 2005 BRAC process.

The [San Antonio Military Transformation Task Force](#) was organized in late November in response to the BRAC decision. It is composed of former and current city and county representatives and area business leaders. To date the group has met only a few times but is actively discussing its role in the up-and-coming changes at the military bases located throughout San Antonio in the wake of the BRAC decision.

The task force is headed by Richard Perez, San Antonio District 4 councilman, along with Lyle Larson, Bexar County Commissioner for Precinct 3, and Michael Novak, former chairman of the board for the [Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce](#).

The task force also consists of seven standing committees that will focus on different areas, such as transportation, medical partnerships and technology.

A new mission

The nine-member BRAC panel delivered its final report to President Bush Sept. 8, and he, in turn, sent it to Congress for legislative review on Sept. 15. Congress had until Nov. 9 to accept or reject the report in its entirety. Congress approved the report on Nov. 8 and the Department of Defense will have until Sept. 11, 2011, to complete the process recommended in the report.

The BRAC decision also calls for several base adjustments, including the relocation of the 59th Medical Wing from Lackland's Wilford Hall Medical Center to Fort Sam Houston, where it would be merged with Brooke Army Medical Center as part of a new San Antonio Regional Medical Center. It also would mean that Fort Sam Houston would be home to a new "center of excellence" in battlefield and trauma care.

Col. Richard Agee, chief of staff for the Army Medical Department Center and School at Fort Sam Houston, said in a previous Business Journal article, that the recommendations outlined by

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Rumsfeld would be of historic significance for San Antonio and for Fort Sam Houston. He says they would likely result in some \$800 million in new construction and redevelopment at Fort Sam Houston alone.

The task force was organized as an extension of the San Antonio Military Missions Task Force that existed during the BRAC round ending in 2005 to help the city and county transition after the BRAC announcement, says Bill Mock, vice president of economic development for the Greater San Antonio Chamber.

"There are a lot of things the community needs to do to help Fort Sam accommodate what they see as an increase of 13,500 people," Mock says. "A lot of it has to do with infrastructure improvements, in terms of roads and access to the base."

One of the first steps, Mock says, is getting the funding for an environmental study needed before any work can be done in the area.

Dollars and cents

Although the funding for the many projects needed around the bases has not yet been realized, Perez says the task force members in their capacities with the city and county will hopefully be able to get funding for the projects.

"I suspect the impact of the BRAC will be one of (the city's) topics when we develop our budget," Perez says of the upcoming city budget process set to begin in May. "So it is very plausible that (the city) might have some dollars set aside in our budget for specific projects (relating to the BRAC decision)."

Perez, who also serves as the chairman of the [Metropolitan Planning Organization \(MPO\)](#), says the MPO has already allocated \$5 million for the reconstruction of Walters Street, which is the main artery in and out of Fort Sam Houston.

The MPO was created by federal law to provide local input for urban transportation planning and allocating federal transportation funds to cities with populations of greater than 50,000.

"There are huge infrastructure needs around Fort Sam that we are going to have to deal with," Perez says. "You're talking about a whole lot more impervious cover, meaning rooftops and roads. When it rains, all that water flows out of the base into the city's drainage system."

Although no formal plans have been made, Perez says the task force is also looking into converting an old railroad bridge near Walter Street into a pedestrian bridge to allow people to walk to and from the base.

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"We need to plan these things out," Perez says. "We are talking about an economic boon for San Antonio. We tout Toyota and the 2,000 jobs it is bringing, which is a huge coo for San Antonio, but we are talking about 13,000 new people. That dwarfs what Toyota is doing."

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Flight precedes flying at Laughlin

[By Bill Sontag](#), Published Page 1 in the Del Rio News-Herald, March 28, 2006

"It's quite the blast up there," said 2nd Lt. Christopher Adams, thinking back to his first solo in the skies above Del Rio.

Adams is assigned to the Transition Flight at Laughlin Air Force Base, but he's at least seven months away from flying an Air Force T-6A "Texan II" trainer.

For now, Adams is flying out of Del Rio International Airport, enrolled in Initial Flight Screening, something of an Air Force-sanctioned sifting process to increase the chances that student pilots have the aptitude for the rigorous training they are about to undertake.

Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laughlin is broadly known as one of the most physically and intellectually demanding forms of military training, what a former wing commander called "the hardest thing you have ever done."

So, for now, Initial Flight Screening programs are scattered around the country, most in gateway communities near Air Force training bases, to effect a transition between college graduation and military service.

Adams, hailing from Redding, Calif., is a 2005 graduate in electrical engineering from Texas A&M University.

Four years in Air Force ROTC, Squadron 18 of the Aggies' Corps of Cadets, served as Adams' underpinnings for the launch of his flying career.

Chance Neel, 24, is the air professor for IFS in Del Rio, teaching the basics to Adams and three other young student pilots headed into the crucible of pilot training at Laughlin.

But such "basics," though rudimentary compared to the sophistication of skills expected of Laughlin graduates, would stymie less motivated "airplane drivers" than those that are sent to Neel.

Neel is a recent college graduate, too, but his degree in aviation sciences from Baylor University, Waco, coupled with his certifications necessary to be a pilot and an IFS flight instructor are his credentials for IFS training out of the Pico Aviation Fixed Base Operator office in Del Rio.

He began work with Laughlin student pilots there on Feb. 27.

Neel and his students fly a Cessna 172 "Skyhawk," an attractive, single-engine prop trainer that he feels is arguably the best initial flight trainer aircraft around.

"It's very forgiving, and that's why we start them on it," Neel said Monday afternoon from the Pico Aviation Offices at DRT. He explained that the aircraft has a center of gravity positioned well forward and under the 36-foot wing, causing the "Skyhawk" to right itself under the most extreme circumstances of stalls and sharp banking turns.

"If stalled or even flipped over, they'll basically fix themselves," Neel chuckled. Landing gear, too, is tough and flexible enough to sustain very hard touchdowns, despite the plane's weight of 2,300 pounds.

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And, Neal said, the "Skyhawk" can land at speeds as slow as 40 knots, or about 46 miles-per-hour.

A sampling of a few of the subjects and skills included in IFS includes ground operations, normal crosswind takeoffs and climbs, straight-and-level flight, climbs and descents, maneuvers during slow flight, steep turns, power-on and power-off stalls, ground reference maneuvers, instrument maneuvers, navigation, simulated forced landings, traffic patterns, and emergency procedures.

The student is expected to complete 19 sorties (flying periods) totaling 25 hours in the air. Two of the sorties are solos, totaling just under two hours.

Adams is nearly halfway through the IFS course, and Neel reported Friday that his student, high scorer on key tests, is performing extremely well. Adams has 10 1/2 hours logged in a rectangular pattern above Del Rio International Airport, including his first exhilarating solo last Friday.

"I was nervous at the start, but once I got up there it felt natural, and I wasn't nervous at all. It was much easier," Adams said.

During his one-hour solo, Adams executed ten touch-and-go maneuvers, describing them as fairly repetitive, but skill-developing, routine.

"We take off into the pattern, turn right on a crosswind leg, then another right on a downwind leg, another right on your base leg, and then turn right again, lined up with the runway for final approach. Then we touch down on the runway, and it's flaps up, and takeoff to do it all again," Adams said.

He's looking forward to getting out of the pattern a bit in the second half of IFS with Neel.

"The next part will be more like maneuvers, out over the practice area across Lake Amistad – steep turns, S-turns and emergency procedures, for example," Adams said.

In September, Adams begins his year of intensive training in Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laughlin.

In a March 20 interview, Col. David Petersen, 47th Operations Group commander at Laughlin, explained that the Air Force pays the Fixed Base Operators, such as Pico Aviation here, to host the services performed by Neel and his peers elsewhere.

All of the students are commissioned officers, most fresh from college. Air Force Academy graduates are scarce in IFS programs because the Colorado Springs campus puts its students through a similar curriculum before graduation.

But Petersen is not sanguine about continuation of such a dispersed arrangement of FBOs and instructors offering IFS near scattered training bases. He explained that the Air Force has opted for a "single site" approach to the training.

"It might begin in a year or so," Petersen said, and Pueblo, Colo., is the expected location.

A bit nonplussed at such news, Neel reiterated the pleasure he derives from his job.

"I took this job because I'm dealing with folks in the top of their class. They're so professional and dedicated, and all of them have interesting backgrounds," Neel said.

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The basics of flight

Chance Neel, Initial Flight Screening instructor at Del Rio International Airport, teaches four young Air Force officers the basics of flight in the Cessna "Skyhawk."

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